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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 096501

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [KAWC](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: A/S BLAKE RAISES IDPS AND REPORT TO
CONGRESS WITH FM BOGOLLAGAMA

Classified By: SCA A/S Robert O. Blake, Jr., reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake urged Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Bogollagama September 15 to allow freedom of movement for internally displaced persons (IDPs) by the end of September, when monsoon rains will begin. A/S Blake stressed that the continued detention of IDPs is contrary to international standards. Bogollagama restated the challenges Sri Lanka faces in screening for former Tamil tiger (LTTE) combatants and the slow pace of demining. He sought to assure A/S Blake of substantial progress on IDP returns over the next month.

12. (C) SUMMARY CONT'D: Blake told Bogollagama that the report being prepared by the State Department Office of War Crimes Investigations (S/WCI) is a Congressionally mandated compilation of information about potential violations of international humanitarian law committed by both sides of the conflict in its final stage -- not a political message. That said, accountability is an important part of political reconciliation. Bogollagama expressed concern about the potential negative impact of the report on the bilateral relationship. Blake and Ambassador for War Crimes Investigations Stephen Rapp met later on September 15 with Sri Lankan Ambassador Wickramasuriya to make the same points. Wickramasuriya also expressed concern for the potential impact on the bilateral relationship, noting that the public and media would respond negatively. He emphasized that the military victory over the LTTE would ease the suffering of all the Sri Lankan people in the long run. END SUMMARY.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR IDPS

13. (C) In a September 15 telephone call to Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, SCA A/S Blake underscored the difficulty the international community will face in continuing to support the IDP camps. More than three months since the end of hostilities, IDPs remain behind barbed wire and, contrary to internationally accepted practice and standards, are not permitted to leave. Bogollagama sought to assure A/S Blake that a substantial number of low-risk IDPs, such as children, the elderly, would be returned over the next month. He noted the 9,400 returns that had recently been announced and pointed to successful, ongoing rehabilitation efforts for former LTTE combatants. Bogollagama blamed the slow pace of returns on the need to demine the areas IDPs had fled, which he maintained was a precondition for returning them to many of their home districts. He argued that progress on demining is being made, namely on roads, and pointed to recently purchased demining equipment from the Czech Republic. At the same time, he questioned the level of productivity of

international NGOs being supported by the U.S. and others in the international community.

14. (C) A/S Blake said he understood the need to ensure that IDPs return to safe areas, but argued that the process of screening former LTTE has slowed GSL's effort. He noted the apparent lack of a timetable to complete the screening process. Bogollagama called the process time-intensive, saying the focus to date has been on feeding and sheltering people. A/S Blake reemphasized that more progress on IDP returns will boost Sri Lanka's standing in the international community, suggesting that the rolling targets announced by the GSL -- targets that it has successively missed by a wide margin -- undermine GSL credibility.

REPORT TO CONGRESS ON POTENTIAL VIOLATIONS
OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

15. (C) Blake stressed the report was ordered by Congress and is not a political message. The report will catalogue potential violations of international humanitarian law by both sides of the conflict. Blake emphasized that accountability is important so that Sri Lanka can have a process of political reconciliation. Bogollagama expressed concern about the impact of the report on U.S.-Sri Lanka relations, suggesting that the Administration could have

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delayed the report or responded to the request from Congress in a manner "sensitive to our relations." Blake responded that was not an option. Bogollagama also expressed concern for the impact of the report on the reconciliation process between the government and Tamils, noting the recent meeting between President Rajapaksa and the Tamil National Alliance.

16. (C) Blake and S/WCI Ambassador Rapp met later on September 15 with Sri Lankan Ambassador to the U.S. Wickramasuriya and DCM Tissa Wijeratne to inform them about the upcoming report. Like Bogollagama, Wickramasuriya expressed concern about the impact of the report on relations with the U.S., suggesting that the report would be received badly by the media and public. While news of the report stings more coming from a friendly country like the U.S., Wickramasuriya stressed President Rajapaksa's determination to maintain strong U.S.-Sri Lanka ties, expressing appreciation for U.S. support in the fight against the LTTE. Wickramasuriya noted that the decision to end definitively the war against the LTTE would, in the long run, ease the suffering faced by all Sri Lankans, in particular Tamils. He also maintained that the decision to pursue a dangerous ground offensive against the LTTE, rather than aerial bombardment, reduced civilian casualties but lost twenty thousand troops in the Sri Lankan Army as a result.
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